Evercasting

A Novelisation by Cameron Dickson

Chapter 1

A Matter of Time

arsh arcs of fire and ice whipped up throughout the central chamber, spiralling around the open space in a shimmering dance of magic. A throng of students, all packed into high rows of seating, let out a collective gasp of amazement at the scene before them. To conjure elements with such ease was no simple task, and as the scintillating show of sorcery bubbled to a stop, a crescendo of applause rose to greet the fellow who had been responsible for the display.

Greybor Kergallow, arch-mage of the Sixth Citadel and original caster of *Kergallow's Cone of Power*, stood tall and mighty on the central pedestal of the chamber. With a raise of one weathered hand, he brought swift silence over the lecture hall. He cleared his throat, and all the students listened intently.

"To conclude," he announced, robes swishing around him as he turned to address the room, "there is no force stronger, in this world or the next, than the base elements. The very building blocks of our reality." With a knowing look, he thumbed at his sharp goatee. "Harness them, truly and fully, and the whole world could become your plaything." A hand suddenly shot up from the front row, with a student teetering from side to side to try and get Kergallow's attention. The professor noticed them, and waved them away. "No questions," he bit at the words. "Away with you now, go!" With a ruckus, the apprentice wizards all began to clamber out of their seats, filing out of the large chamber. "Oh, and remember to read a chapter of Cosdesio before our next session!"

A few moments later and Kergallow was thundering down marble corridors, lit by pools of grey light flooding through the row of arched windows. A keen apprentice was following with all haste, hurrying as fast as their booted legs could manage. Smothered in blue robes, with a pointed and wide-brimmed hat perched firmly atop their little head, the young mage Loopy cleared her throat to address her elder.

"That seemed to go well," she piped up, speaking to the arch-mage's back as she followed him through the halls.

"I think it rather did," Kergallow agreed, which made a change from his usually aggressive form of conversing. The older man, who never quite revealed his age, grew silent again as he led Loopy back towards his office. Over a month

ago, now, the apprentice wizard had been thrilled to take up a position as Greybor Kergallow's *second*. She'd imagined it to be an academically scintillating endeavour, with the opportunity to harness her magic alongside a veteran of the arcane arts. In reality, however, the position of Kergallow's second was nothing more than a glorified clerk. Loopy spent more time rearranging bookshelves and organising stacks of parchment than she did following the old wizard back and forth from the lecture hall, and that was certainly saying something.

"I've been thinking," Loopy began, choosing her words carefully as she followed Kergallow through the gilded doorway into his office. "Seeing you conjure elements in these lectures has been a wonderful thing. I've much enjoyed the opportunity to be your second, but I thought it would come with more one-to-one tutoring." She nervously fiddled with her hands behind her back. "What I'm saying is, could you spare some time to teach me?"
Kergallow, who always seemed to be in a rush, hurriedly gulped some tea from a dainty cup on his desk, rattling the saucer as he put it back down. Now he was back in his office, it very much seemed like he was disregarding her question.

"Time, time, time." He picked up an ornate mirror and combed at his greying goatee. "If only one had the power to control time, eh? Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose it would." Loopy didn't like where this response seemed to be going, and she frowned as the arch-mage vented a dramatic sigh at the head of the chamber.

"You'd be wise to not overstep the mark, Loopy." Kergallow narrowed his thin eyes. "I won't be seen teaching my most powerful of magic to the daughter of a *knight*." He tossed down his mirror, rearranging the cuffs of his robes and hurrying back down to the doorway of the office. "I hired a second to ease my workload, not to teach more magic than I already do. And besides," he hissed as he pulled open the doorway, "don't you have *books* you need to be arranging?" And with a snap of the mechanism, the door swung shut behind him. Loopy was left alone in the grand office, surrounded by magical trinkets and high bookshelves lining each wall.

"Oh," she murmured, staring down at the ground with an empty feeling brewing inside. "That's that, then." Wiping her nose with a baggy sleeve, the young wizard decided it was best to get to work. "Wouldn't want to give the great

Greybor Kergallow another reason to complain," she muttered to herself, collecting the empty cup and saucer from the arch-mage's desk and returning it to his Gosdesian tea trolley – a contraption magically able to clean any stains, no matter how difficult.

In the time that followed, Loopy busied herself with organising Kergallow's bookshelves to take her mind off the fact that her genuine interest in the arcane had been rudely declined. She may have been the *daughter of a knight*, but she also had magical abilities like every other student in his grand academy. What did her upbringing matter?
Trying to push these thoughts to the back of her mind, Loopy grunted as she clambered up and down the rickety ladder that rolled along the face of the bookshelves, allowing her to reach the tomes at the very top. It seemed like every week Kergallow wanted his books organised in a different way. First it was alphabetical, then topically, then even colour-coded. This time, however, he'd insisted that the books be organised *chronologically.*

  "Funny," Loopy muttered, checking for dates on a few rolled-up scrolls. Half of them didn't even have them. "He does this to just make my life difficult, I know it." She discarded the scrolls onto a nearby desk, leaning back on the ladder to reach for a tome on the top shelf. Then, suddenly, something intriguing caught her eye. A dark book, poking out ever-so-slightly from a little slot in the wall just below the ceiling. She was almost certain she'd never catalogued that tome before. Frowning, Loopy faltered for a moment before endeavouring to reach up for the book. The rickety ladder wobbled beneath her boots but she steadied herself. "Come on," she breathed, straining as she groped helplessly upwards, "come to Loopy." With difficulty, she eventually felt her finger connect with the spine of the book, and she dragged it inch by inch towards her. After a breath or two the tome was teetering precariously on the edge, and Loopy made one last effort to tip it into her grasp. And that was when the ladder suddenly collapsed beneath her.
Tumbling to the ground, Loopy had the breath knocked out of her as she felt her back roughly thud into the wooden floor of Kergallow's office. She wheezed out a breath, and watched as the book fell suddenly down with her and collided against the table. It bounced to the floor, flipping open and landing on a page with a large clock symbol etched into it. Then something strange started to happen.

Something utterly bizarre. A magical energy began seeping from the pages of the tome, pulsing around the room in slender strands of green. It was like bubbles, and sparkles, and fairy dust in the air, all mingling together and enveloping the room in a sorcerous fog.

"This isn't good," Loopy trembled, reaching out to try and close the book. Yet as her fingers graced the edge of the parchment, they jolted away quickly in a painful shock of energy. "*Ow, ow, ouch*!" Loopy shook off her fingers, staring down helplessly at the magical tome before her. The page it was open to was adorned with symbols of hourglasses, with inky letters scrawled deep into the parchment discussing the nature of time and its passing. The young mage felt utterly powerless as she watched the magical energy flow around her, pulsing with a grim chill, and all of a sudden the green tendrils of light began to wrap around her limbs. They grabbed at her arms, coiled around her legs, and suddenly Loopy felt herself being dragged through a vortex of swirling energy into a place she didn't belong. And throughout it all, there was only one thing she could hear repeating constantly in her brain. One noise, ominous and unwavering. The ever-present reminder of mortality.

The sound of t*ick... tick... tick.*

Chapter 2

Magic in the Wilds

With a gulp of air caught in her throat, Loopy felt herself be thrown free from the wild vortex of magic. Her vision was a swirling blur of green and gold, and she came to a crashing halt amongst something soft. She laid there, eyes squeezed shut as a damp chill began to seep into her clothes. The dizziness of her vision slowly began to fade, and eventually Loopy regained some semblance of consciousness. She managed to force open her eyes, and the world around her was not at all what she'd been expecting.

It was as if the very air itself was laced with darkness. Loopy craned her neck and saw she was buried amongst snow, with the blueish night sky looming high above her. Her hat was poking out from the snow about five feet away from her, upside down from having been flung from the young mage's head during the commotion. Kergallow's office seemed to have been left long in the past, and Loopy had no idea where she found herself now. Imposing structures were shadowed in the distance, bathed in dusk, and she dreaded to think what else lurked out there in the dark.

"I knew Kergallow's books would be the end of me," Loopy wheezed, straining as she clambered up out of the snow. She stumbled towards her hat, feet squelching around in her sodden boots, and placed the now-drooping headwear back onto her head. Little icicles had formed on the wide brim, hanging down in front of her face, but that was the least of her worries. Dread filled her as she realised it was almost impossible to get her bearings in the dark, and the wizard furrowed her brow to look up at the sky. It was a canvas of swirling blues and blacks, but something stood out harsh amongst the dark hues. Or rather, a *lack* of something.

"No stars," Loopy frowned, scratching at the side of her forehead. "Not even a moon." She chuckled anxiously to herself, not finding anything even remotely funny. The crushing reality of her situation was slowly beginning to sink in. "Where *am* I?" Loopy spun helplessly around, wondering where to go next. Should she stay there, in case any portal home opened up? Or pick a direction at random and explore? Gulping nervously, Loopy's eyes landed on the structures

in the distance. An old cradle of civilisation, doused in shadow. It seemed to be the next logical destination. Was it to be her gruesome end, or new beginning?

After lethargically trudging her way through the dense snow underfoot, Loopy eventually found herself amongst the buildings she'd once viewed at a distance. Up close now, the wizard could see that the structures were all abandoned ruins. The darkness of night clung close around every corner, and Loopy nervously held her breath with each new turn she took. The snow-dappled streets of this ruined complex were tight and twisting, and the path took her through alleyways where the walls were etched with indecipherable symbols and runes. Loopy gulped as she tried to make sense of the nonsensical carvings, running a hand along the rough surface. It was cold to touch, branded with deep indents where symbols had been dug into the stonework. She could make out the crossed lines of an hourglass, pooling out carved dots of sand in an ominous vortex. There was a winged symbol of a clockface, flying above the sharp peaks of four mountains. Loopy couldn't make heads or tails of it all.

   "Where has Kergallow sent me?" she whispered, removing her hand from the stone and letting it drop limp to her side. Her thoughts raced as she looked at the ruins around her, but that was all suddenly put to a harsh stop by a loud echoing screech from the alleys up ahead. It was a guttural wail that forced Loopy to double over and block her ears, causing any curiosity about the origin of these ruins to topple swiftly out of her mind. The shrill noise slowly subsided to a growl, and the young mage stood woozily upright, eyes trying to make out shapes in the shadows. Something nasty loomed around the next corner, lurking in the darkness, and Loopy didn't particularly want to find out what – but she didn't have much of a choice. She could either admit defeat by turning back around to the wilderness, dying of starvation in the endless fields of snow. Or she could muster her courage and face the mystery ahead. There was only one logical decision an aspiring wizard could make.

Trying to psych herself up, Loopy fished a metallic flask from her satchel, unscrewing the top and taking a swig. A splash of hoppy warmth hit the back of her throat, liquid courage, and with a satisfied hum she dropped the flask back

into her bag. Next she sourced her spell book, heaving the leather-bound book into her grasp and opening it to the yellowed page titled *Kergallow's Cone of Power*. Dire instances required the strongest of spells, and Loopy made sure to carefully rehearse the incantation before proceeding. Eventually it seemed she could dilly-dally no longer. Loopy held her spell book tight and began walking towards the looming danger.

"The daughter of a knight has bravery enough," she muttered to herself, reciting words her father had told her before she left him for the Sixth Citadel and Kergallow's service. "Magic will take you far, but it's a steady heart that wins the day." Letting out a long breath, Loopy steadied herself and rounded the corner into a dusky courtyard surrounded by tall pillars and crumbled stonework. High in the centre, floating in the air, was a wispy creature with mean intentions, screeching into the darkness and turning to face Loopy as she entered the courtyard. There was no time to lose. Still clutching her spell book, the young mage began to cast *Kergallow's Cone of Power*. She muttered the words of the spell beneath her breath, completing the incantation and holding out her hand to unleash a shockwave of magical power. But no such shockwave came. Frowning at her outstretched palm, Loopy wiggled her wrist around a little to try and provoke some semblance of a spell. Yet it proved futile... her magic was *useless*. She flipped through her spell book to try and find a different attack, but before she even could the elemental creature was onto her, screeching as it summoned a flash of blue. Loopy sucked in a sudden breath as a piercing pain shot through her stomach, and she looked down to see a glowing shard of crystalline ice sticking out of her midriff. The young wizard stumbled back, dropping to her knees. The life was fading fast from her.

"This isn't how it was supposed to end," she whimpered, spell book dropping to the ground at her side. Her vision was going blurry and dark, and with one last burst of energy she swung a fist at the elemental ahead. But she missed by a long shot, and tumbled down to the cold floor. Her senses muffled and went dark, and the apprentice mage Loopy grew lifeless amongst the cold ruins...

"*Ah!*"

With a sudden inhale of breath, Loopy felt her limbs be released from the tendrils of green and gold energy, tumbling down from the swirling vortex into a heap of snow. She crashed to a halt, clothes getting damp, hat flung from her head. The young wizard clambered to her feet, boots full of water. Dizzy memories flooded into her mind… she could've sworn she'd done all of this before.

"Where am I?" she breathed, picking up her hat and wiping the snow off the brim. Donning it, she glanced at the dark landscape around her, eyes eventually landing on the imposing ruins cradled in the distance. And then everything clicked in her head. Memories came rushing back. That was where she'd *died.* She looked at her hands worriedly, as if she'd never seen them before.

"It failed me," she mumbled, flexing her fingers. "My magic *failed me.*" Trying to shake off her feeling of unease, Loopy sourced the spell book from her satchel and flipped to the page titled *Kergallow's Cone of Power*. She read and reread the passages, running a finger beneath each line of the incantation. It just didn't make sense. She'd recited the spell perfectly, word for word - there was no reason for it to fail. With a nervous hum, she snapped the tome shut, letting it fall limp to her side. Ignoring her faulty magic, there was another rather obvious question she'd been forgetting up until that point. Loopy furrowed her brow. "How am I *alive?*"

Unable to answer that question, the apprentice mage resigned herself to retracing her steps, trudging through the dense snow fields back towards the ruins. The ominous lack of stars was unnerving as she looked into the inky black expanse of the sky above her, and she raised a baggy blue sleeve to shield against the wind. Slowly she approached the site of her previous demise, breath quickening as she ducked through the stone alleys and crumbling streets. Yet it all felt different, this time. Loopy knew what she was up against, now. She felt like she could survive anything.

Entering into the shrieking courtyard, the young mage locked eyes onto the elemental creature floating ahead. It let out another hideous wail, eyes red, preparing to attack, and Loopy knew she had to get there first. The nervous wizard held out her hand and hoped, trying to summon as much determination as she could. And – to her immense surprise – she felt a great surge of heat blaze forth from her palm. Rippling flames shot out towards the elemental, licking at

the air and dousing the creature in burning heat. It let out a wailing screech of pain, stretching out its arms as it burst into ash and cinders.

Loopy stumbled back as the flames subsided, mouth agape as she looked at the pile of dust that was once her enemy. The elemental had been incinerated into utter nothingness. The young mage was certain she'd never used a spell like that before. She looked down at her hands, trying to comprehend what they'd produced, and was surprised to see that her usually blue robes had now turned a fiery red. The cloth warmed her, each thread emanating heat, and she felt her whole body ease. Loopy was glad to be out of the cold.

"How's that for the *base elements*, Kergallow," she muttered, glancing around to ensure there were no other elementals in her vicinity. Loopy steadied herself, taking a deep breath before ducking through into the next alleyway. The walls loomed high, imposing on either side, dousing the area in ominous darkness. The apprentice took another sip from her flask, wincing in expectation of the alcohol burning at the back of her throat. But no such sensation came. A faint smooth tingle blended with the warmth from her new robes, and Loopy let out a comfortable sigh. She rather enjoyed her new fiery spirit.

Dashing from alley to alley, the young wizard felt like she was beginning to get towards the end of these foreign structures. The built-up ruins that made up the streets were slowly beginning to dwindle, giving way to more piled heaps of glistening snow. With her newly red robes swishing out behind her, Loopy hurried from a walled complex to arrive at a large flat stone expanse, bridging a canyon-like crater in the landscape. Ornate pillars lined the structure, clumped with hanging icicles, and at the far end of the bridge stood a majestic monument looming tall on the horizon. It was some sort of gateway, with a sharp roof and rigid gables shadowing a wide nameplate. Dark words were carved into the stone, huge and readable even from the opposite end of the lengthy bridge – *Whitewhisper Veil.* A throbbing blue glow emanated from the heart of the gateway, almost akin to a portal, and it beckoned Loopy towards it. The apprentice wizard ran fast across the length of the bridge, kicking up snow and slush with her heels. Perhaps *this* was the way out she'd been looking for. She skidded to an abrupt halt only a few steps away from the gateway, staring up at the blue energy looming ahead. But something nagged at the back of her mind, a question she'd been avoiding ever since she'd been in this dour and cold expanse.

"I *died*," she muttered, holding out her hands. "I cast *pure fire*. Even my *robes* have changed." She didn't have the answers to any of it, and she was furious that she hadn't yet discovered the secrets of this place. But she wasn't going to turn up an opportunity to leave. Sighing to herself, Loopy fiddled with the bag on her waist and sourced her spell book, staring longingly at all the pages of magic she was yet to master. The fire she'd summoned to defeat the elemental creature wasn't detailed in the yellowed pages whatsoever, and it made her realise that maybe she didn't need a spell book after all. With a pang of guilt, she tore out a fistful of pages from the old book and released them to be taken by the wind. The chill air carried them aloft, leaves of parchment swirling out into the endless void of darkness and vanishing against the horizon. With a final breath of surety, Loopy closed the tome with a snap and tossed it from the bridge, watching it sink down into the canyon below. She didn't need those spells anymore. She would make her own path.

Nodding to herself, Loopy stepped back from the edge of the bridge and turned to face the gateway titled *Whitewhisper Veil.* It loomed ominously at the end of the path, sharp stonework jutting up into the sky. At its centre was a portal emanating blue light that danced in the darkness, pulsing and glowing with magical intent. Just as Loopy began to wander towards it, she looked up at the sky and noticed small white flecks beginning to float down to meet her. Pure snowflakes, rich with life. They fell down to the ground, settling into the stonework. She held out her arm and saw a flake or two land on her red robes, sizzling into nothingness upon coming into contact with the warm thread. The closer she stepped towards this *Whitewhisper Veil,* the thicker the snowfall seemed to be, and Loopy was sure that wherever this new portal took her, it would be a better experience than the place she found herself stuck in now. Stepping up the last set of stairs towards the blue glow of the gateway, Loopy took one last backwards glance at the ruins she'd just travelled through. The ruins she'd *died* in, and yet somehow come back to life. The young witch wasn't sure if she'd ever find out just how she'd survived. Taking one last gulp of the cold wintery air, Loopy noticed a yellowed page of her spell book float past on the wind, whisked away from one side of the horizon to the other. She smiled at it, finally feeling free from under Kergallow's thumb. Perhaps this whole situation was a blessing in disguise. Choosing to believe that, Loopy took one last swig

from her flask and stepped through the portal, feeling the weight of her body lighten. She let herself be whisked off towards *Whitewhisper Veil*, clutching to her hat as the chimes of time still repeated in her head.

Tick... tick... tick.

To Be Continued...